

Joseph Dandridge and the first Aurelian Society

By D. E. ALLEN

Joseph Dandridge (fl. 1660-1744) is a curiously neglected figure in the early annals of British entomology. This may well be accounted for by his having, apparently, written nowhere on his work in print, for historians of natural history have traditionally been bibliographers—or at any rate bibliophiles—and have tended to limit their concern to authors and their books. If anything, Dandridge is slightly better known among botanists, although ironically under an apparently erroneous first name. He was also one of the earliest collectors of fossils, shells, birds' eggs and bird skins, but in these fields his pioneer activities seem to have been passed over unnoticed.

The most valuable basic account of him is provided by Da Costa (1812), a one-time librarian of the Royal Society:

'He lived on the pavement in Moorfields near to Beth'lehem; was a silk pattern-drawer; thick and of a middle size. I used to be frequently with him in the summer of 1740, and, though he was then upwards of 80, he was extremely affable and communicative. He told me many anecdotes of the old collectors, was very merry and chatty. He died about three or four years after, and had two daughters, single women. He had a fine collection of natural history, as fossils, birds, shells, etc.; but his chief display was in insects, well kept and judiciously arranged, and shewed them with great pleasure, and with instruction. By his favour I saw his collection several times'.

'Upwards of 80' in 1740 places his birth in 1660 or earlier. He first appears on the natural history scene during the 1690s as one of the circle of collectors who sent butterflies to John Ray to assist him in his work on the posthumous *Historia Insectorum* (1710). Further butterfly records, from Dulwich, Box Hill and elsewhere, are credited to him in Petiver's *Gazophylacium* (1702-06). To Petiver, who died in 1718, he also contributed interesting plants: Petiver's herbarium, now incorporated in the great Sloane collection in the British Museum (Natural History), includes a specimen of Dandridge's from as far afield as Dover (Dandy, 1958). There are further botanical specimens of his in the herbarium of the Rev. Adam Buddle, also now incorporated in the Sloane collection. Buddle's interest in London botany is known to have begun about 1700, from which date he made many excursions, especially in search of grasses and mosses, with Petiver and other naturalists of the period up to his death in 1715. A manuscript note of Buddle's in the Sloane collection describes Dandridge as 'a pattern-drawer in Moorfields', which bears out De Costa's statement and suggests that this remained his one and only occupation throughout his working life. Another botanical friend was James Sherard, who is recorded in the Dillenian *Synopsis* (1724) as having found an uncommon Toadflax near Henley in company with Mr. Dandridge of Stoke Newington. It is interesting to note that Dandridge, Sherard (b. 1659), Buddle (b. about 1660) and Petiver (b. 1663/4) were all very close to each other in age; and it is tempting to see in this a friendship going back a good many years. Quite possibly Dandridge and Petiver, at any rate, had known each other since apprenticeship days.

Certainly, in these years before 1715, Dandridge seems already to have

become *the* name in London entomology. This is borne out in particular by Eleazar Albin in his preface to *A Natural History of English Insects* (1720), in which he describes how, following his first attempts to paint butterflies, 'after some time this brought me acquainted with Mr. Dandridge, a very ingenious man, and very curious in observing the works of nature: he had devoted himself some years with collecting insects, and observing their several progressions from the egg, thro' their worm-state, to the fly; this curious person employed me in painting caterpillars for him, and recommended me to Mrs. How, widow of the late famous physician of that name'. The original meeting with Dandridge must have taken place well before 1715, as it was only considerably later, Albin implies, that he was introduced to the first Duchess of Beaufort (who died at the beginning of 1716). Albin describes specimens taken by him as early as 1714 in the marshes near Rotherhithe, a *locus classicus* of the collectors of the period, which may indeed have owed its original discovery to Dandridge, who certainly collected there himself (cf. Wilkes, 1748-49, p. 12).

Benjamin Wilkes, a painter by profession like Albin and Moses Harris, is another who warmly acknowledges Dandridge 'as his principal mentor in entomology'. Praising his readiness at all times to assist other collectors, he pays special tribute to the access he was freely given to Dandridge's 'noble collection' and notes, the fruit of forty years' experience—though, presumably, as Dandridge had begun collecting at least as early as the 1690s, his experience went back a good deal farther even than this.

'The Curious Cabinet' of Mr. Dandridge, who has so industriously collected the Insects of our own Country' also features extensively in the pages of Richard Bradley's *A Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature* (1721). Three of the plates in this work are actually based on specimens contained in it. Apart from Lepidoptera, Dandridge had evidently already collected widely in other orders, including Trichoptera and Hymenoptera; and there is a particularly interesting statement (p. 131) on the subject of spiders, of which there are reported to be 'above a hundred and forty different kinds of them in England only, as the curious Mr. Dandridge of Moorfields has observ'd and delineat'd'. Nine of his specimens are figured in illustration of each of the nine classes into which he believed the English spiders could be divided. One of these specimens, it is interesting to note, was 'taken under the Eaves of a House at Newington'. Observations of his on insect copulation are also included (p. 137). Reference to his botanical work, however, is limited to a mention (p. 21) of the collection of paintings or figures of over a hundred kinds of mushrooms and toadstools collected by him in England.

The friendship with the wealthy apothecary James Sherard and his brother William, the munificent patron of natural history, dates from some time before 1719. In March of that year Dandridge is reported by the Sherards to have been the first discoverer of a certain lichen in England, in a wood between Highgate and Hornsey; and a few months later, in a further letter to Dr. Richard Richardson, the Yorkshire naturalist, there is mention of his 'numerous and curious collection' of birds' eggs. By 1720 he was also forming a collection of stuffed birds (Nichols, 1817, pp. 359, 370). Around the same time, too, he was collecting fungi extensively for Dr. Dillenius, then an employee of the Sherards, and many records stand to his name in the Dillenian edition of Ray's *Synopsis* (1724).

In March 1720-1, William Sherard reported to Richardson (Turner, 1835, p. 167) that 'Mr. Dandridge is ill, and forc'd to Newington for the air, where he has been several weeks'. This is the earliest reference that can be traced to Stoke Newington. It is not clear whether this became his permanent residence for the next few years or whether he also kept on his town house in Moorfields and commuted between the two—which would imply a certain affluence. Unfortunately, no reference to him can be found in the local collection at Stoke Newington Public Library. James Brown (1818) has, however, recorded that the house in which he lived there from about 1723 to 1730 was a small one, 'which I well remember, it having been for fifteen years of my life in full view from the windows of my study'. From this slender evidence it might still prove possible to locate its actual site. Should the house still be standing, it surely merits a commemorative plaque.

Brown adds that Dandridge was a renowned Aurelian 'and pursued his sport with so much eagerness as to have given rise to stories which came down to my time'. According to one of these he was once taken for a lunatic by a farm labourer, who had watched him wildly lunging at the air for no reason that was at all apparent. On pinning him down, his suspicions were only too amply confirmed when all that emerged from the poor wretch's lips was the bitter cry: "The Purple Emperor's gone! The Purple Emperor's gone!"

Brown's account is headed 'Thomas Dandridge', but everywhere else in the literature (in so far as he is not identified outright as Joseph) he is referred to simply as 'Mr. Dandridge'. There is no evidence to suggest that there were two naturalists at this period bearing the same uncommon surname, and one can only conclude that 'Thomas' was a slip of the memory on Brown's part. Unfortunately, the error has crept from this source into the botanical literature and has had the effect of largely obscuring the central part played by Dandridge on the natural history stage at this period.

A further fact mentioned by Brown provides a useful clue to filling in some of the rest of Dandridge's background. He was, Brown asserts, a near relative, 'perhaps father or uncle', of James Dandridge, 'who was, I believe, a sugar-baker in or near Wood Street, Cheapside, and whom I remember Sheriff of London in 1758-9'. However, if Da Costa is correct, Dandridge only had two daughters. Uncle, therefore, seems the likely relationship, and this indeed has been independently suggested, on purely genealogical grounds, by Curtis (1933), who was unaware of Brown's note. James Dandridge, Esq., actually resided in Queen Street, Cheapside, at the time of his election as Sheriff, according to Curtis. A John Dandridge, Esq., who died in November 1773, is described as living in this same street and was probably a brother of James. James was also a liveryman of the Company of Merchant Taylors and it is in the light of this that Curtis suggests that a Joseph Dandridge who appears as a liveryman of the same company in the lists for 1700 and 1710 was in fact the naturalist. One other point of interest revealed by Curtis is that the London Dandridges were quite possibly near kinsmen of Martha (née Dandridge), the wife of George Washington.

In addition to the outstanding encouragement he appears to have given to all entomologists of promise and the valuable contribution clearly made by his collecting to the early works on English Lepidoptera, there is strong

reason to suspect that Dandridge was also the chief inspirer, possibly even the original founder, of the first Aurelian Society, probably the earliest specialist entomological society in the world. That we know anything about this body is largely due to the graphic description by Moses Harris (1758-65) of the loss of its valuable collection, its books and all regalia in a great fire in Cornhill in March 1747-8. The members were then in session nearby in the Swan Tavern and only narrowly escaped with their lives, many of them leaving behind even their hats and canes. 'Their loss so much disheartened them that, although they several times met for that purpose, they never could collect so many as would be sufficient to form a society'. This story has been recounted in print several times since (e.g. by Stainton, 1858), but no attempt has apparently been made to uncover anything further about the Society, presumably in the belief that as the fire consumed all its records this has been rendered totally impossible. This is not, however, altogether the case.

To begin with, it can be established that the Society was in existence at least by 1738—and a life of ten years was no inconsiderable feat for a learned society in the eighteenth century. This date can be deduced from the statement by Wilkes, in the preface to his chief work, that he became interested in the colours of butterflies and moths on being invited by a friend to a meeting of the Aurelian Society, which he thereupon joined; 'and for ten years past' his leisure was subsequently chiefly employed in collecting and drawing Lepidoptera. Wilkes's book was issued in parts and at least the earlier of these can be dated by the words 'this year (1748)' that conveniently appear on page 23. Assuming that the preface was written before the first parts were issued, it must date from 1748 or perhaps even 1747. The latter date is possibly rather more likely in view of the absence of any allusion to the catastrophic demise of the Society, which in the case of so devoted a member—his *Twelve New Designs of English Butterflies* (1742) was dedicated to the Society, it is also worth noting—is difficult to understand, unless the words in the preface were written before the event had taken place.

Some four years after Wilkes's first visit another member, Moses Harris, took his twelve-year-old nephew (of the same name) along with him to one of the meetings. This was the first introduction to entomology of the boy who was later to become the great illustrator of British insects. We now know he was born in 1730 (Lisney, 1960, p. 156), so this visit to the Society must have been in 1742 or thereabouts. The sudden conversion of raw visitors in this way says a lot for the atmosphere the Society must have engendered, and its seminal role in producing both Wilkes and Harris, thereby indirectly fathering their influential books, is justification enough in itself for its existence.

Until now it seems to have escaped notice that there is even more to be learned about the Society by reading Wilkes very carefully. Having described the crucial part it played in interesting him in the subject and listed its favourite hunting-grounds in the London area, he ends up, rather unusually, with a list of subscribers to, and *encouragers* of, his work. Examining this closely, it will be noticed that the names cited fall into three clearly distinct categories: the nobility and gentry, a considerable number of persons distinguished by the prefixes 'Mr.', 'Mrs.' or 'Miss' and only a bare surname (who were presumably lowlier subscribers obtained through the booksellers and other intermediaries, and thus personally

unknown to the author), and finally sixteen men for whom both Christian name and surname are invariably given without the prefix 'Mr.' I suggest that these sixteen are, in fact, Wilkes's 'encouragers'—for he must surely have known them fairly well to take the liberty of using their Christian names and omitting the customary 'Mr.'—further, that many of them were unable to afford the very high rate of subscription and accordingly Wilkes devised this way of associating their names with his work by way of tribute to their help; and, most important of all, that they represent none other than the backbone of the membership of the Aurelian Society. The sixteen names are:

Stephen Austin	Philip Constable, Junior	Samuel Lee
Henry Baker	Joseph Dandridge	Daniel Marshal
Ephraim Bell	Thomas Grace	Edmund Overall
Elias Brownsword	Samuel Hartley	William Wells
Walter Blackett	Thomas Knowlton	
Peter Collinson	James Lemon	

Of these names two, apart from Dandridge, are well known. Peter Collinson was a wealthy Quaker merchant who corresponded with Linnaeus; Wilkes refers to him as a breeder of Lepidoptera (p. 20) and he is mentioned in later years by Moses Harris. Knowlton, a one-time gardener to James Sherard at Eltham and a veteran horticulturalist, also features along with Dandridge in the list of subscribers to Albin's work of 1720. James Lemon, also in Albin's list (where the spelling is given, probably more correctly, as Leman), is described by Moses Harris (1758-65, p. 43) as the owner of a 'curious cabinet' of insects. Others who are more familiar with the lesser-known early collectors may be able to suggest further identifications in due course. None of the rest, at any rate, appear to feature in the botanical literature of the period. The names have a distinctly plebeian ring to them and, if the attribution proposed here is correct, make it seem more than ever likely that the Society was predominantly composed of men in trade—and no doubt in relatively humble positions at that. This would have effectively precluded the gentry, and possibly even professional men as well, from becoming closely associated with its activities.

We still do not know how long the Society had been in existence before 1738. Had it been going by 1720, Albin, surely, would have made some reference to it, particularly in view of his acquaintance with Dandridge. It is of some importance to try to establish its age and origin more precisely, for organised natural history, with all the implications this has for the standardising of field methods and equipment, had its first beginnings in Britain in this early part of the eighteenth century. A rather similar body, the small Botanical Society run in London in 1721-26 by John Martyn, appears to have played a corresponding role in the field of botany. Its members, however, appear to have been of rather higher social standing than the Aurelians (Allen, 1966) and the two societies, so far as one can make out, had no contact with one another.

The second Aurelian Society, if we are to believe Moses Harris, had little connection with the first except in its name. Its records, too, have not survived. We know, however, that it was established around 1762 and that Harris acted as its Secretary. Other members included Dru Drury, the wealthy silversmith in the Strand who acted as patron to Harris and accompanied him in the field on occasions, and Henry Smeathman, some-

time Secretary to the London Chamber of Commerce and later a professional collector in West Africa. Another may have been James Lee, the celebrated Hammersmith nurseryman and populariser of Linnaeus, who made several insect-hunting expeditions round London in 1767-68 with the visiting Danish naturalist J. C. Fabricius. It is to Fabricius (1784, Letter VII) that we owe the knowledge that this second Society soon dissolved through internal dissension. It is said to have lasted only about four years.

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Season '65

By T. W. HARMAN

This year I will not recount the dates of emergence of all the common spring moths, such records get rather tedious for readers year after year. Of interest in early spring was *Apocheima hispidaria* Schiff. on the 19th March, an uncommon moth in the garden. With the temperature up to a near record for March of 70° F. on the 28th, butterflies responded well and swarmed in the garden, making a promising-looking start to the season. The next day was a record 73° F., but cold nights followed and moths were not tempted out to any great extent. As a result of these conditions, a trip to an oak wood some miles south of here on 3rd April with Captain Ellerton and Mr. J. A. C. Greenwood for *A. hispidaria* found us too late, not one specimen being seen. That night a female *Biston strataria* Hufn. came to light early, the first I have seen at light.

We spent Easter at Sheffield with friends, and while there I was introduced to the Derbyshire moors by Mr. Brian Elliott. What an introduction! We made two trips to the moors taking mercury vapour and larvae-hunting lamps. On one occasion we had frost and on the other a violent snowstorm on the way home. We did find a few larvae, but *Colostygia multistrigaria* Haw. was the only moth able to brave these arctic conditions. As always appears to happen, as soon as we got back to Medmenham, conditions improved considerably and the 24th April, the day of return, brought out *Orthosia advena* Schiff., *Cucullia verbasci* L., and *Gypsites leucographa*